

# WHISPERING SMITH

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDRE BOWLES

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## SYNOPSIS.

Murray Sinclair and his gang of wreckers were called out to clear the railroad tracks at Smoky Creek. McCloud, a young road superintendent, caught Sinclair and his men in the act of looting the wrecked train. Sinclair pleaded innocence, declaring it only amounted to a small sum—a treat for the men. McCloud discharged the whole outfit and ordered the wreckage burned. McCloud became acquainted with Dickie Dunning, a girl of the west, who came to look at the wreck. She gave him a message for Sinclair. "Whispering" Gordon Smith told President Bucks of the railroad, of McCloud's brave fight against a gang of crazed miners and that was the reason for the superintendent's appointment to his high office. McCloud arranged to board at the boarding house of Mrs. Sinclair, the ex-foreman's deserted wife. Dickie Dunning was the daughter of the late Richard Dunning, who had died of a broken heart shortly after his wife's demise, which occurred after one year of married life. Sinclair visited Marion Sinclair's shop and a fight between him and McCloud was narrowly averted. Smoky Creek bridge was mysteriously burned. McCloud prepared to face the situation. President Bucks notified Smith that he had work ahead. McCloud worked for days and finally got the division running in fairly good order. He overheard Dickie criticizing his methods to Marion Sinclair. A stock train was wrecked by an open switch. Later a passenger train was held up and the express car robbed. Two men of a posse pursuing the bandits were killed. McCloud was notified that Whispering Smith was to hunt the desperadoes. Bill Dancin, a road hound, proposed that Sinclair and his gang be sent to hunt the bandits. A stranger, apparently with authority, told him to go ahead. Dancin was told the stranger was "Whispering Smith." Smith approached Sinclair. He tried to buy him off, but failed. He warned McCloud that his life was in danger. McCloud was carried forcibly into Lance Dunning's presence. Dunning refused the railroad a right-of-way, he had already signed for. Dickie interfered to prevent a shooting affray. Dickie met McCloud on a lonely trail to warn him his life was in danger.

## CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

"Miss Dunning, won't you listen just a moment? Please don't run away!" McCloud was trying to come up with her. "Won't you hear me a moment? I have suffered some little humiliation to-day; I should really rather be shot up than have more put on me. I am a man and you are a woman, and it is already dark. Isn't it for me to see you safely to the house? Won't you at least pretend I can act as an escort and let me go with you? I should make a poor figure trying to catch you on horseback."

Dickie nodded naively. "With that horse."

"With any horse—I know that," said McCloud, keeping at her side.

"But I can't let you ride back with me," declared Dickie, urging Jim and looking directly at McCloud for the first time. "How could I explain?"

"Let me explain. I am famous for explaining," urged McCloud, spurring, too.

"And will you tell me what I should be doing while you were explaining?" she asked.

"Perhaps getting ready a first aid for the injured."

"I feel as if I ought to run away," declared Dickie, since she had clearly decided not to. "It will have to be a compromise, I suppose. You must not ride farther than the first gate, and let us take this trail instead of the road. Now make your horse go as fast as you can and I'll keep up."

But McCloud's horse, though not a wonder, went too fast to suit his rider, who divided his efforts between checking him and keeping up the conversation. When McCloud dismounted to open Dickie's gate, and stood in the twilight with his hat in his hand and his bridle over his arm, he was telling a story about Marion Sinclair, and Dickie in the saddle, tapping her

McCloud laid his head low and spurred his horse.

knee with her bridle-rein, was looking down and past him as if the light upon his face were too bright. Before she would start away she made him remount, and he said good-by only after half a promise from her that she would show him sometime a trail to the top of Bridger's Peak, with a view of the Peace river on the east and the whole Mission range and the park country on the north. Then she rode away at an amazing run.

McCloud galloped toward the pass with one determination—that he would have a horse, and a good one, one that could travel with him, if it cost him his salary. He exulted as he rode, for the day had brought him everything he wished, and humiliation had been

swallowed up in triumph. It was nearly dark when he reached the crest between the hills. At this point the southern grade of the pass winds sharply, whence its name, the Elbow; but from the head of the pass the grade may be commanded at intervals for half a mile. Trotting down this road with his head in a whirl of excitement, McCloud heard the crack of a rifle; at the same instant he felt a sharp slap at his hat. Instinct works on all brave men very much alike. McCloud dropped forward in his saddle, and, seeking no explanation, laid his head low and spurred Bill Dancin's horse for life or death. The horse, quite amazed, bolted and swerved down the grade like a snipe, with his rider crouching close for a second shot. But no second shot came, and after another mile McCloud ventured to take off his hat and put his finger through the holes in it, though he did not stop his horse to make the examination. When they reached the open country the horse had settled into a fast, long stride that not only redeemed his reputation but relieved his rider's nerves.

When McCloud entered his office it was half past nine o'clock, and the first thing he did before turning on the lights was to draw the window shades. He examined the hat again, with sensations that were new to him—fear, resentment, and a hearty hatred of his enemies. But all the while the picture of Dickie remained. He thought of her nodding to him as they parted in the saddle, and her picture blotted out all that had followed.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### At the Wickiup.

Two nights later Whispering Smith rode into Medicine Bend. "I've been up around Williams Cache," he said, answering McCloud's greeting as he entered the upstairs office. "How goes it?" He was in his riding rig, just as he had come from a late supper.

When he asked for news McCloud told him the story of the trouble with Lance Dunning over the survey, and added that he had referred the matter to Glover. He told then of his unpleasant surprise when riding home afterward.

"Yes," assented Smith, looking with feverish interest at McCloud's head; "I heard about it."

"That's odd, for I haven't said a word about the matter to anybody but Marion Sinclair, and you haven't seen her."

"I heard up the country. It is great luck that he missed you."

"Who missed me?"

"The man that was after you."

"The bullet went through my hat."

"Let me see the hat."

McCloud produced it. It was a heavy, broad-brimmed Stetson, with a bullet hole cut cleanly through the front and the back of the crown. Smith made McCloud put the hat on and describe his position when the shot was fired. McCloud stood up, and Whispering Smith eyed him and put questions.

"What do you think of it?" asked McCloud when he had done.

Smith leaned forward on the table and pushed McCloud's hat toward him as if the incident were closed. "There is no question in my mind, and there never has been, but that Stetson puts up the best hat worn on the range."

McCloud raised his eyebrows. "Why, thank you! Your conclusion clears things so. After you speak a man has nothing to do but guess."

"But, by heaven, George," exclaimed Smith, speaking with unaccustomed fervor, "Miss Dickie Dunning is a hummer, isn't she? That child will have the whole range going in another year. To think of her standing up and lashing her cousin in that way when he was browbeating a railroad man!"

"Where did you hear about that?"

"The whole Crawling Stone country is talking about it. You never told me you had a misunderstanding with Dickie Dunning at Marion's. Loosen up!"

"I will loosen up in the way you do. What scared me most, Gordon, was waiting for the second shot. Why didn't he fire again?"

"Doubtless he thought he had you the first time. Any man big enough to start after you is not used to shooting twice at 250 yards. He probably thought you were falling out of the saddle; and it was dark. I can account for everything but your reaching the pass so late. How did you spend all your time between the ranch and the foothills?"

McCloud saw there was no escape from telling of his meeting with Dickie Dunning, of her warning, and of his ride to the gate with her. Every point brought a suppressed exclamation from Whispering Smith. "So she gave you your life," he mused. "Good for her! If you had got into the pass on time you could not have got away—the cards were stacked for you. He overestimated you a little, George; just a little. Good men make mistakes. The sport of circumstances that we are! The sport of circumstances!"

"Now tell me how you heard so

much about it, Gordon, and where?"

"Through a friend, but forget it."

"Do you know who shot at me?"

"Yes."

"I think I do, too. I think it was the fellow that shot so well with the rifle at the barbecue—what was his name? He was working for Sinclair, and perhaps is yet."

"You mean Seagrue, the Montana cowboy? No, you are wrong. Seagrue is a man-killer, but a square one."

"How do you know?"

"I will tell you sometime—but this was not Seagrue."

"One of Dunning's men, was it? Stormy Gorman?"

"No, no, a very different sort! Stormy is a wind-bag. The man that is after you is in town at this minute, and he has come to stay until he finishes his job."

"The devil! That's what makes your eyes so bright, is it? Do you know him?"

"I have seen him. You may see him yourself if you want to."

"I'd like nothing better. When?"

"To-night—in 30 minutes." McCloud closed his desk. There was a rap at the door.

"That must be Kennedy," said Smith. "I haven't seen him, but I sent him word for him to meet me here." The door opened and Kennedy entered the room.

"Sit down, Farrell," said Whispering Smith, easily. "Ve gates?"

"How's that?"

"We geht es? Don't pretend you can't make out my German. He is trying to let on he is not a Dutchman," observed Whispering Smith to McCloud. "You wouldn't believe it, but I can remember when Farrell wore wooden shoes and lighted his pipe with a candle. He sleeps under a feather bed yet. Du Sang is in town, Farrell."

"Du Sang!" echoed the tall man with mild interest as he picked up a ruler and, throwing his leg on the edge of the table, looked cheerful.

"How long has Du Sang been in town? Visiting friends or doing business?"

"He is after your superintendent. He has been here since four o'clock, I reckon, and I've ridden a hard road today to get in time to talk it over with him. Want to go?"

Kennedy slapped his leg with the ruler. "I always want to go, don't I?"

"Farrell, if you hadn't been a railroad man you would have made a great undertaker, do you know that?" Kennedy, slapping his leg, showed his ivory teeth. "You have such an instinct for funerals," added Whispering Smith.

"Now, Mr. Smith! Well, who are we waiting for? I'm ready," said Kennedy, taking out his revolver and examining it.

McCloud put on his new hat and asked if he should take a gun. "You are really accompanying me as my guest, George," explained Whispering Smith, reproachfully. "Won't it be fun to shove this man right under Du Sang's nose and make him bat his eyes?" he added to Kennedy. "Well, put one in your pocket if you like, George, provided you have one that will go off when sufficiently urged."

McCloud opened the drawer of the table and took from it a revolver. Whispering Smith reached out his hand for the gun, examined it, and handed it back.

"You don't like it."

Smith smiled a sickly approbation. "A forty-five gun with a thirty-eight bore, George. A little light for shock; a little light. A bullet is intended to knock a man down; not necessarily to kill him, but, if possible, to keep him from killing you. Never mind, we all have our fads. Come on!"

At the foot of the stairs Whispering Smith stopped. "Now I don't know where we shall find this man, but we'll try the Three Horses." As they started down the street McCloud took the inside of the sidewalk, but Smith dropped behind and brought McCloud into the middle. They failed to find Du Sang at the Three Horses, and leaving started to round up the street. They visited many places, but each was entered in the same way. Kennedy sauntered in first and moved slowly ahead. He was to step aside only in case he saw Du Sang. McCloud in every instance followed him, with Whispering Smith just behind, amiably surprised. They spent an hour in and out of the Front street resorts, but their search was fruitless.

"You are sure he is in town?" asked Kennedy. The three men stood deliberating in the shadow of a side street.

"Sure!" answered Whispering Smith. "Of course, if he turns the trick he wants to get away quietly. He is lying low. Who is that, Farrell?"

A man passing out of the shadow of a shade tree was crossing Fort street 100 feet away.

"It looks like our party," whispered Kennedy. "No, stop a bit!" They drew back into the shadow. "That is Du Sang," said Kennedy; "I know his hobble."

## CHAPTER XV.

### A Test.

Du Sang had the sidewise gait of a wolf, and crossed the street with the choppy walk of the man out of a long saddle. Being both uncertain and quick, he was a man to slip a trail easily. He traveled around the block and disappeared among the many open doors that blazed along Hill street. Less alert trailers than the two behind him would have been at fault; but when he entered the place he was

looking for, Kennedy was so close that Du Sang could have spoken to him had he turned around.

Kennedy passed directly ahead. A moment later Whispering Smith put his head inside the door of the joint Du Sang had entered, withdrew it, and, rejoining his companions, spoke in an undertone: "A negro dive; he's lying low. Now we will keep our regular order. It's a half-basement, with a bar on the left; crap games at the table behind the screen on the right. Kennedy, will you take the rear end of the bar? It covers the whole room and the back door. George, pass in ahead of me and step just to the left of the slot machine; you've got the front door there and everything behind the screen, and I can get close to Du Sang. Look for a thin, yellow-faced man with a brown hat and a brown shirt—and pink eyes—shooting craps under this window. I'll shoot craps with him. Is your heart pumping, George? Never mind, this is easy! Farrell, you're first!"

The dive, badly lighted and ventilated, was counted tough among tough places. White men and colored mixed before the bar and about the tables. When Smith stepped around the screen and into the flare of the hanging lamps, Du Sang stood in the small corner below the screened street window. McCloud, though vitally interested in looking at the man that had come to town to kill him, felt his attention continually wandering back to Whispering Smith. The clatter of the rolling dice, the guttural jargon of the negro gamblers, the drift of men to and from the bar, and the clouds of tobacco smoke made a hazy background for the stoop-shouldered man with his gray hat and shabby coat, dust-covered and travel-stained. Industrious licking the broken wrapper of a cheap cigar and rolling it fondly under his forefinger, he was making his way unostentatiously toward Du Sang. Thirty-odd men were in the saloon, but only two knew what the storm center moving slowly across the room might develop. Kennedy, seeing everything and talking pleasantly with one of the barkeepers, his close-set teeth gleaming 20 feet away, stood at the end of the bar sliding an empty glass between his hands. Whispering Smith pushed past the on-lookers to get to the end of the table where Du Sang was shooting. He made no effort to attract Du Sang's attention, and when the latter looked up he could have pulled the gray hat from the head of the man whose brown eyes were mildly fixed on Du Sang's dice; they were lying just in front of Smith. Looking indifferently at the intruder, Du Sang reached for the dice; just ahead of his right hand, Whispering Smith's right hand, the finger-tips extended on the table, rested in front of them; it might have been through accident, or it might have been through design. In his left hand Smith held the broken cigar, and without looking at Du Sang he passed the wrapper again over the tip of his tongue and slowly across his lips.

Du Sang now looked sharply at him, and Smith looked at his cigar. Others were playing around the semi-circular table—it might mean nothing. Du Sang waited. Smith lifted his right hand from the table and felt in his waistcoat for a match. Du Sang, however, made no effort to take up the dice. He watched Whispering Smith scratch a match on the table, and, either because it failed to light or through design, it was scratched the second time on the table, marking a cross between the two dice.

The meanest negro in the joint would not have stood that, yet Du Sang hesitated. Whispering Smith, mildly surprised, looked up. "Hello, Pearlina! You shooting here?" He pushed the dice back toward the out-law. "Shoot again!"

Du Sang, scowling, snapped the dice and threw badly.

"Up jump the devil, is it? Shoot again!" And, pushing back the dice, Smith moved closer to Du Sang. The two men touched arms. Du Sang, threatened in a way wholly new to him, waited like a snake braved by a mysterious enemy. His eyes blinked like a badger's. He caught up the dice and threw. "Is that the best you can do?" asked Smith. "See here!" He took up the dice. "Shoot with me!" Smith threw the dice up the table toward Du Sang. Once he threw craps, but, reaching directly in front of Du Sang, he picked the dice up and threw eleven. "Shoot with me, Du Sang."

"What's your game?" snapped Du Sang, with an oath.

"What do you care, if I've got the coin? I'll throw you for \$20 gold pieces."

Du Sang's eyes glittered. Unable to understand the reason for the affront, he stood like a cat waiting to spring. "This is my game!" he snarled.

"Then play it."

"Look here, what do you want?" he demanded, angrily.

Smith stepped closer. "Any game you've got. I'll throw you left-handed, Du Sang." With his right hand he snapped the dice under Du Sang's nose and looked squarely into his eyes. "Got any Sugar Bites money?"

Du Sang for an instant looked keenly back; his eyes contracted in that time to a mere narrow slit; then, sudden as thought, he sprang back into the corner. Kennedy, directly across the table, watched the lightning-like move. For the first time the crap-dealer looked impatiently up.

It was a showdown. No one watching the two men under the window breathed for a moment. Whispering



"Take Your Hand from Your Gun, You Albino!"

Smith, motionless, only watched the half-closed eyes. "You can't shoot craps," he said, coldly. "What can you shoot, Pearlina? You can't stop a man on horseback."

Du Sang knew he must try for a quick kill or make a retreat. He took in the field at a glance. Kennedy's teeth gleamed only ten feet away, and with his right hand half under his coat lapel he toyed with his watch-chain. McCloud had moved in from the point of the table, looking at Du Sang and laughing at him. Whispering Smith threw off all pretense.

"Take your hand away from your gun, you albino! I'll blow your head off left-handed if you pull! Will you get out of this town to-night? If you can't drop a man in the saddle at 250 yards, what do you think you'd look like after a break with me? Go back to the whelp that hired you, and tell him when he wants a friend of mine to send a man that can shoot. If you are within 20 miles of Medicine Bend at daylight I'll rope you like a fat cow and drag you down Front street!"

Du Sang, with burning eyes, shrank narrower and smaller into his corner, ready to shoot if he had to, but not liking the chances. No man in Williams Cache could pull or shoot with Du Sang, but no man in the mountains had ever drawn successfully against the man that faced him.

Whispering Smith saw that he would not draw. He taunted him again in low tones, and, backing away, spoke laughingly to McCloud. While Kennedy covered the corner, Smith backed to the door and waited for the two to join him. They waited a moment at the door, then they backed slowly up the steps and out into the street.

There was no talk till they reached the Wickiup office. "Now, will some of you tell me who Du Sang is?" asked McCloud, after Kennedy and Whispering Smith with banter and laughing had gone over the scene.

Kennedy picked up the ruler. "The wickedest, cruellest man in the bunch—and the best shot."

"Where is your hat, George—the one he put the bullet through?" asked Whispering Smith, limp in the big chair. "Burn it up; he thinks he missed you. Burn it up now. Never let him find out what a close call you had, Du Sang! Yes, he is cold-blooded as a wild-cat and cruel as a soft bullet. Du Sang would shoot a dying man, George, just to keep him quivering in the dirt. Did you ever see such eyes in a human being, set like that and blinking so in the light? It's bad enough to watch a man when you can see his eyes. Here's hoping we're done with him!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### New Plans.

Callahan crushed the tobacco under his thumb in the palm of his right hand. "So I am sorry to add," he concluded to McCloud, "that you are now out of a job." The two men were facing each other across the table in McCloud's office. "Personally, I am not sorry to say it, either," added Callahan, slowly filling the bowl of his pipe.

McCloud said nothing to the point, as there seemed to be nothing to say until he had heard more. "I never knew before that you were left-handed," he returned, evasively.

"It's a lucky thing, because it won't do for a freight-traffic man, nowadays, to let his right hand know what his left hand does," observed Callahan, looking for a moment. Whispering

left-handed man in the traffic department, but the man that handles the rebates, Jimmie Black, is cross-eyed. Bucks offered to send him to Chicago to have Bryson straighten his eyes, but Jimmie thinks it is better to have them as they are for the present, so he can look at a thing in two different ways—one for the interstate commerce commission and one for himself. You haven't heard, then?" continued Callahan, returning to his riddle about McCloud's job. "Why, Lance Dunning has gone into the United States court and got an injunction against us on the Crawling Stone line—fled us up tighter than zero. No more construction there for a year at least. Dunning comes in for himself and for a cousin who is his ward, and three or four little ranchers have filed bills—so it's up to the lawyers for 80 per cent of the gate receipts and peace. Personally, I'm glad of it. It gives you a chance to look after this operating for a year yourself. We are going to be swamped with freight traffic this year, and I want it moved through the mountains like checkers for the next six months. You know what I mean, George."

To McCloud the news came, in spite of himself, as a blow. The results he had attained in building through the lower valley had given him a name among the engineers of the whole line. The splendid showing of the winter construction, on which he had depended to enable him to finish the whole work within the year, was by this news brought to naught. Those of the railroad men who said he could not deliver a completed line within the year could never be answered now. And there was some slight bitterness in the reflection that the very stumbling-block to hold him back, to rob him of his chance for a reputation with men like Glover and Bucks, should be the lands of Dickie Dunning.

He made no complaint. On the division he took hold with new energy and bent his faculties on the operating problems. At Marion's he saw Dickie at intervals, and only to fall more hopelessly under her spell each time. She could be serious and she could be volatile and she could be something between which he could never quite make out. She could be serious with him when he was serious, and totally irresponsible the next minute with Marion. On the other hand, when McCloud attempted to be flip-pant, Dickie could be confusingly grave. Once when he was bantering with her at Marion's she tried to say something about her regret that complications over the right of way should have arisen; but McCloud made light of it, and waved the matter aside as if he were a cavalier. Dickie did not like it, but it was only that he was afraid she would realize he was a mere railroad superintendent with hopes of a record for promotion quite blasted. And as if this obstacle to a greater reputation were not enough, a willer enemy threatened in the spring to leave only shreds and patches of what he had already earned.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Quite a Difference.

"How dare you?" exclaimed the angry composer to his critic. "How dare you, sir, characterize my music as you have?"

"I don't understand you," demurs the critic.

"You said that my rhapsody impromptu was a bum tune!"

"Bum tune! Oh, my good friend, I said no such thing! I said it was a ve-grant melody."—Judge.